

Rutland Herald

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Article published May 29, 2006

## UNICEF chief's theme for Middlebury grads is globalization

MIDDLEBURY — With globalization, the fate of even the poorest children in the most remote countries now influences our own, UNICEF director Ann Veneman told Middlebury College's graduating class Sunday.

Several thousand attended the outdoor ceremony, taking advantage of what staff said was the best commencement weather in nine years. They applauded when honorary degrees were awarded to Veneman; Shelburne Farms president Alexander Webb; environmental researcher and leader Robin Bell, Class of 1980; international Medical Mission Hall of Fame member Dr. Richard Hodes; and Chinese writer and teacher Lihua Yu, mother of the coordinator of the college's Chinese and Japanese Schools and grandmother of graduate Tara Sun Vanacore.

But the loudest applause and cheers came when 30-year Sen. James Jeffords, I-Vt., was awarded his honorary degree. Introducing him, college President Ronald Liebowitz said the man whose favorite movie was "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington" had been the model for what a legislator should be, as well as showing the world something about "the independence of Vermonters."

The choice of Veneman as speaker became controversial as soon as it was announced in March, not so much because of her work with UNICEF as because of her prior career.

She became the first female U.S. secretary of agriculture, from 2001 to 2004, but during that time received a letter from Vermont's congressional delegation that criticized her agency's treatment of dairy farmers and said it was an example of the administration's "farmer-unfriendly" policies.

The college announcement of her choice said she had grown up on a "family farm in a small rural community."

But a public letter by faculty critical of the choice said Modesto, Calif., population about 200,000, was "an agribusiness hub," and they noted that the founder of the family farm had been undersecretary of Health,

Education and Welfare for the Nixon administration.

Veneman, between the time she was deputy secretary of agriculture in the first Bush administration and her appointment as secretary of the California Food and Agriculture Department in the mid 1990s, had been on the board of directors of biotech giant Calgene (later bought by Monsanto) and had been a lobbyist in Washington for Dole Foods, the letter said.

When Veneman began as UNICEF's head, she was asked if she would continue the agency's relatively new focus on women's reproductive rights, sexuality education, and education for girls as factors in child health. According to Planned Parenthood, her reply was, "I don't believe that these issues are relevant to the mission of UNICEF."

On Sunday, several students said they agreed with the dissenting faculty that Veneman did not represent the college's ethical values, though they would listen to what she had to say without any overt protest.

Vanacore, from Bridport, Vt., said, "Growing up here, I've seen a lot of small family farms struggle or be forced out of business in competition with bigger companies."

Veneman has favored big corporations, Vanacore said, but "I think a lot of people didn't realize," so she was chosen.

In the end, Veneman's speech was very much attuned to a college where 10 percent of the students are international and where the flags of dozens of countries wave.

"Globalization is not a prediction, it's a reality," Veneman began.

She cited the view of Thomas Friedman ("The World is Flat") that international competition began with nations in the era of Columbus and other explorers, became competition between companies around the year 1800 when Middlebury College was founded, and now was between individuals.

To take part in the global economy, "all it takes is a computer and a connection to the outside world," she said.

Reflecting on the way messages travel across the Atlantic Ocean 282 times faster than in 1492, she said that if the world physically shrank

by it would be "just slightly larger than a golf ball."

But also, Veneman said, if you can't see the link with a starving child in Africa, "you simply are not looking hard enough."

It matters to us, or should, that a billion people live on less than a dollar a day, she said.

You don't have to look in the face of a dying mother or child to care, she said, "but if you do, I promise you it will alter how you look at humanity."

Veneman spoke of the 12-year-old girl she met from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where rape had been a weapon of warfare. That girl, asked what she wanted to be when she grew up, said, "I want to be a nun."

"One person who works to save a child is worth a thousand of those who are on the sidelines complaining about the state of the world," Veneman said. "One person can help change the world."

"I see in your generation tremendous compassion and integrity," Veneman said, "a generation that is growing up in the belief that financial status does not determine its true worth. A generation to whom hard work, honesty and strong personal values are as important as ever."

"Seek to continuously improve and learn," she counseled, and "give something of yourself and help your fellow human beings."

The following Vermont students graduating from Middlebury College:

Elizabeth Walker, South Burlington; Constance Winner, Middlebury; Phoebe Chap, Royalton; April Butler, Irasburg; Aaron Kraut, Plymouth; Tara Sun Vanacore, Bridport; Thomas Hand, Dorset; Daniel Hutner, Jr., Manchester; Joseph Powers, Cornwall; Allyson Burke, Brownsville.

Also Simon Perkins, Manchester; Asher Burns-Burg, Middlesex; Andrea LaRosa, Waitsfield; Richard Root, Chester; Ryan Kelley, East Dorset; Marianne Reed, South Burlington; Nathan Morris, Hubbardton; April Peet, Cornwall; Kenneth Donahue, Rutland.

Also Gregory Petrics, Killington; Julie Godfrey, Montgomery Center; Brett Cluff, Charlotte; David Coriell, Mendon; Caitlin Connolly,

Burlington; Elena Kennedy, Norwich; Polly Lynn, Middlebury; Joya Taft-Dick; Nora Segar, Marlboro; Courtney Lynn Swanda, Bennington.